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LENS 4: Hugo Cabret

Reader-as-Writer

Purpose: To analyze the method author Brian Selznick chose to advance his story and reflect on its strengths/weaknesses

Audience: Peers in Children and Literature class or writers who are interested in critiques of other’s works so that they may improve their own writing

Genre: Informal Essay

Engagement: I’ve never actually written down or thought in depth about what elements of a story move me. When I read a book, I usually acknowledge what I like about its plot—this book challenged that in the way that it made me reflect of my views on something as simple as presentation and the way I look at books as a whole and in the different ways they can enrich a person’s life.

I found *The* *Invention of Hugo Cabret* especially engaging compared to the other texts we have read thus far. I’m a little embarrassed to admit that I was relieved when I initially skimmed through the book and found that it contained a lot of illustrations; which was strange and antithetical in itself because I’m not usually a “picture book” reader (unless I’m reading to my children, of course). It was a welcome change and allowed me to feel like a child again but in a way that made me feel as if it retained a sort of “adult” air to it—the book is obviously a little bit advanced for say, a seven-year-old child.

*King of Shadows* approached the historical fiction genre in a similar manner but I have to say, I did not find it as compelling as *Hugo Cabret.* I suspect that this can be attributed to the way the history or “back story” in this book was presented in each: *King of Shadows,* while being a very good read, relied on the interest of the reader in its plot to form that bridge in which the reader can connect to Shakespeare’s works and perhaps, seek it out on their own after finishing the novel. In my opinion, *Hugo Cabret* does a much better job of making the reader feel invested in its story and very intelligently, included actual works from the person that inspired it. It also makes you feel as if you are solving the mystery along with Hugo and Isabelle. With the passage of each chapter, you feel as if you are that much closer to an answer.

### One of the very beautiful things about this book were the illustrations—they were gorgeous and very helpful in advancing the storyline. Sometimes you were given several pages of illustrations to tell the story without words. I found this to be a novel and exciting way to tell a story. For instance, a scene in the text involved the Station Inspector chasing Hugo all around the station. Almost forty consecutive pages were devoted to illustrating the chase and it was an interesting way to build the kind of tension, drama, and intensity you find normally as written word, as well an inspired way to pay homage to [Georges Méliès](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_M%C3%A9li%C3%A8s) (after all, a film is just a set of moving pictures). I felt terror seeing a close-up of an imposing hand is reaching out in the darkness and anxious when I saw the picture of the Inspector three feet away from a ladder leading up to an opening where a Hugo’s foot was poking out of. Additionally, the book’s brilliant inclusion of historical photographs was, in my opinion, a much more effective way to foster a reader’s interest on the topic on which it was based. Seeing the photograph of the train hanging out of the station was so jarring that I immediately searched for the accident on Google, while seeing actual images of [Georges Méliès](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_M%C3%A9li%C3%A8s)’ films sent me to Wikipedia and YouTube—what an awesome way to get readers to learn more about the history behind this book.

### Writing down my ideas about *Hugo Cabret* forced me to consider my views on aesthetics and my personal taste. I spend roughly 95% of my time attending to my children’s needs so it’s really nice to just be able to sit down, read a book, and write down my accompanying thoughts—it’s wonderful to have some time for yourself to reflect. Having children leaves little time for that, naturally but personal growth is important and necessary for anyone to be happy so I think I will try to write more often when the time permits. It made me think of this section in Chapter 1 of *Pleasures* on the usefulness of writing down your thoughts. On page 11, William Zinsser is quoted as having said that “Writing organized and clarifies our thoughts.” According to *Pleasures*, “as people write, gaps and illogicalities in their thinking become apparent”—to write would obviously be useful to someone on a quest to know themselves better; to someone who wants to be aware of what inspires or moves them and how they can use this awareness to grow.